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Letter of the Superior General: Rome, July 10, 2001

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Rome, July 10, 2001

Dear brothers and sisters, members of the Vincentian Family,

May the grace and peace of God, Our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Each year, about this time, we write to ask all the members of our Vincentian Family to begin to prepare for the day of common prayer that we celebrate around September 27. This year our day of prayer will be quite special.

During a meeting held last February in Paris in which the heads of many of the principal branches of our Family participated, we decided, for the first time in our history, to invite all our branches to focus on a common theme for the next two years: "The Globalization of Charity: The Struggle Against Hunger." With the help of a committee composed of members of the various branches, we have prepared a PowerPoint presentation, in various languages, which explains the project that we are undertaking together as members of the Vincentian Family and suggests various strategies for combatting hunger. I am enclosing a written version of the PowerPoint presentation, which can be distributed to the members of our Family and used as the basis for discussion and for formulating concrete projects in the diverse cultural situations where we live and serve.

This campaign against hunger will be our common focus over the next two years, beginning on September 27, 2001 and lasting until September 27, 2003. Over the course of that time, the committee mentioned above will help all of us in evaluating periodically what the results of the campaign against hunger are and in sharing experiences about the projects that the various branches are undertaking.

We could say much more about this common focus, but the enclosed materials explain it rather fully. The PowerPoint presentation can be downloaded from our site

(www.famvin.org). It is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian.

Of course, as in recent years, we urge all of the members of our Family, in all of the different countries, to come together around September 27, 2001, for our annual day of prayer. In order to facilitate this, we are attaching a page of guidelines for organizing the day.

As you can see, this year's day of prayer is a unique occasion, since we will be launching the campaign against hunger together, while asking the Lord to deepen the roots of his kingdom among us. With you, we thank the Lord for the gifts he has given our Family and pray that he will continue to strengthen us in our commitment to stand at the side of the poor and to offer ourselves to him as their servants.

Patricia Palacios de Nava
President , AIC (founded in 1617)

Yvon Laroche, rsv
Superior General, Religious of
St. Vincent de Paul (founded in 1845)

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General, Congregation of the
Mission (founded in 1625)

Gladys Abi-Saïd
President, Vincentian
Marian Youth (founded in 1847)

Sr. Juana Elizondo, D.C.
Superior General, Daughters of
Charity (founded in 1633)

Charles Shelby, C.M.
Miraculous Medal Association
(founded in 1905)

José Ramón Díaz Torremocha
President, St. Vincent de Paul
Society (founded in 1833)

Eva Villar
President, MISEVI
(founded in 1999)

“The Globalization of Charity: The Fight against Hunger”

Vincentian Family www.famvin.org

27 sept. 2001 - 27 sept. 2003

Introduction

We, the leaders of some of the branches of the Vincentian Family, during our meeting in Paris, at the dawn of the new millennium, chose **hunger** as our common focus for the next two years. From September 27, 2001 until September 27, 2003, we propose to channel the energies of our various branches to fight this disaster. Our common motto during this two-year period will be:

“The Globalization of Charity: The Fight against Hunger”

1. Context of the Reality

Almost 800 million people, about one-sixth of the population of the world's developing nations, suffer from malnutrition. Of this, 200 million are children. (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

Around 24,000 people die daily from hunger or hunger-related causes, 75% of whom are children under the age of five. (The Hunger Project, United Nations). At present, 10% of the children in developing countries die before the age of five. (CARE).

Aside from death, chronic malnutrition also causes impaired vision, listlessness, stunted growth and increased susceptibility to diseases. Persons who suffer severe malnutrition are unable to function at even a basic level. (World Food Program, United Nations).

In the last fifty years, almost 400 million people around the world have died of hunger and poor sanitary conditions. This is three times the number of people killed in all the wars fought in the entire 20th century. (BFWI).

The problem lies in food distribution, not in its production. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has fixed the minimum daily intake requirement per person at 2,350 calories. Worldwide, there are 2,720 calories available per person per day. More than 50 countries fall below that requirement. They do not produce enough food to feed their population nor can they afford the importation of the necessary products to fill the gap. The majority of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Often, it takes only a few simple resources for impoverished people to be able to cultivate enough food to become self-sufficient. These resources include quality

seeds, appropriate tools and access to water. Small improvements in farming techniques and food storage methods are also helpful. (Oxfam).

2. Spirituality

Dear sons and daughters of St. Vincent, search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long-term solutions, adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so you will work for the credibility of the Gospel and of the Church. (Pope John Paul II during the CM General Assembly, 1986)^{*}

3. Types of Intervention

3.1 Provide food immediately

Hunger is one of those problems that demand an immediate response, as St. Vincent often demonstrated in practice. When there is no response, people die. Later on, we will suggest some projects that offer an immediate response to hunger.

3.1.1 Breakfast for school children

In many countries, children go to school without having eaten any breakfast. Malnutrition severely impedes their attention span and learning capacity. In many countries throughout the world, members of the Vincentian Family sponsor breakfast programs in schools.

3.1. 2 Soup Kitchens

Many parishes or pastoral centers offer meals to those who are hungry, at midday or in the evening. Occasionally, those meals are served in a way that shows great respect for the dignity of the poor. They are seated at table and provided with a well-balanced meal served in a warm and friendly manner.

3.1.3 Feeding program for pregnant mothers

In our missions, as well as in our parishes, we can implement programs that support projects for malnourished pregnant women, helping them cope with their situation by offering them and their child better conditions.

3.1.4 “Bread for the poor”

^{*} *Vincentiana* XXX (1986), p. 417.

One branch of the Vincentian Family, at the local or national level, sets aside the weekly cost of bread during a period of time (e.g. one month). This amount is collected by each association and deposited in a special account for the campaign against hunger. This project can be done in parishes, schools, etc.

3.1.5 Attention to prisoners who die of hunger and sickness

The Bishops of Africa have made a call to Religious to give special attention to those who are detained. By obtaining the necessary permission from the authorities and visiting the prisoners, we can detect their basic nutritional and medical needs, establishing links with their families and giving them hope. Monetary donations for this end are solicited in those countries where the Vincentian Family is present.

3.1.6 “The shared pot”

A stew is prepared in a big pot and different persons in the community contribute vegetables, legumes, meat and other food. This is distributed to the most needy persons in the community (housewives, children, elderly, sick persons). This project can be done in communities, districts and day care centers, either in rural or urban areas.

3.1.7 “Loose change”

This project can be done in a store or chain of supermarkets where buyers donate their loose change. Food is then purchased with the money collected for those who suffer hunger.

3.1.8 “Brotherhood”

Associations or local groups of the Vincentian Family send a reasonable amount to different mothers of families to help in their expenses. This will enable them to buy a little bit more food, with the condition that they should feed another person poorer than themselves. This project is mutually beneficial.

3.1.9 “Keep some for others”

Keep in the pantry some food to be shared weekly or monthly with other families or persons who are poor. This food can be given to specific persons or groups.

3.2 Attack the causes

This is a more difficult task, but in the long run more effective. This problem of hunger can be eradicated. Though 24,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes, this number is down from ten years ago, when there were 35,000 victims daily, and that of twenty years ago when there were 41,000 daily. Many experts on hunger believe that, ultimately, the best way to reduce it is through education. Later on, we will suggest some lines of action directed toward attacking the causes of hunger.

3.2.1 Basic education

Basic education is probably one of the most important instruments for breaking out of the cycle of poverty. In 1998, in developing nations, about 130 million eligible children out of a total of 625 million did not attend primary school. Of this, 73 million were girls. (UNICEF)

Small projects aimed at teaching and putting into practice basic agricultural methods, basic irrigation, raising animals for food consumption and establishment of fish farms are proposed.

3.2.2 Cooperatives

Cooperative or community stores in which the poor can sell, exchange, and barter their products, or purchase basic commodities at more affordable prices.

3.2.3 Awareness & participation

Instill in institutions and civil society in general, through means of communication, an awareness of the possibilities of solidarity with the social classes or under-developed countries. This can be accomplished by proposing other structures or laws that will provide funding for food programs.

3.2.4 Set up a Food Bank

Set up a food bank based on a network of agencies working together in the delivery, acceptance, control, administration and distribution of perishable items that have been donated and are in good condition. This may be done in places where there are food suppliers or producers.

3.2.5 Investigation on the use of surplus food

With the support of agencies and universities, have a team look into the use of surplus food on the local, regional and national levels. In order to publicize such investigation and the concrete proposals on food distribution, it is advisable to hold awareness campaigns through participative forums or by proposing concrete action to denounce and rectify these situations.

3.2.6 “A day (weekly or monthly) against hunger”

In each country or region the VF will organize an awareness campaign for the community or a period of effective solidarity supporting the fight against hunger. To achieve this objective, researches are to be organized and publicized in pamphlets, forums, and conferences. Practical educational programs may be proposed, as well as assistance in cultivation, collection and distribution of food, etc.

3.2.7 Work hand-in-hand with public authorities

The Vincentian Family in each country seeks to be in solidarity with the actions and programs of the Church, NGOs and the government. Suggestions on how to implement the campaign against hunger will be proposed, whereby effective means of intervention, community awareness and offering education are established.

4. Publicity Strategies

For the diffusion of this project, we propose to define the “what” and “how” of communication:

4.1 Develop an outline for the implementation of communication strategies to create awareness and inform the society in general about this project. (For example, write interesting articles about the project in each of the news bulletins of the different branches of the Vincentian Family).

4.2 In the same manner, efforts should be made to assure the continuity of the projects in the society at least for the next two years.

4.3 Emphasis must be given to the promotion of the logo agreed upon in order to facilitate unity and distinctness worldwide.

4.4 Use a common motto for all the branches and publicize it in all means of communication (radio, press, television, web page), as well as in the different Associations' alternative means of communication (news bulletins, posters, news videos, announcements, e-mail, reports, conferences, workshops, campaigns, etc.)

Motto: “The Globalization of Charity: The Fight against Hunger”

4.5 Dedicate a time for detailed reflection on the hunger problem during the meetings, seminars and encounters of the officers of the Vincentian Family on the national or international level. Offer information, statistical data, and invite the participation of experts who will give testimonies and relate experiences of the projects. It is recommended to point out that globalizing the fight against hunger could very well help solve other problems. It would not be wise to merely consider hunger as an unavoidable disaster affecting a great part of humanity.

4.6 An active and frequent contact with the various agencies worldwide that investigate the problem of hunger, sharing with them our experience and receiving information in regards to efforts made to solve this problem.

4.7 Review the project every trimester, through the Internet or other means, and eventually make the necessary changes to it.

5. Program Planning

Launch the campaign on September 27, 2001 to end on September 27, 2003.

Six months into the campaign, ask for feedback and sharing on the projects that are being implemented.

After one year, ask the national councils to send to the commission* the projects that have already been done or are currently being done, in order to share them with others. It is requested that this be sent in a way that it can be published on the web page.

The Coordinating Council of the Vincentian Family on the national level is asked to reflect and study the causes of poverty and the possible projects that each branch can undertake or perhaps, a common project for all.

Encourage that the work be done in the form of “projects”.

6. Evaluation

In order to evaluate the projects, it is proposed that, from the beginning, indicators that will help give an idea on the dimensions of the project and the results obtained be fixed. Thus, by uniting all the small initiatives we will become a major force with great social impact. (The indicators could be, for example: 1 - type of person: elderly, children, pregnant women, prisoners; 2 - number of persons who went to the soup kitchens; 3 - number of meals served; 4 - money collected and products purchased, the various products that were produced in a particular period of time; etc.)

* Any Rodríguez (AIC – Mexico) – Coordinator of the Commission for the Project of the Fight Against Hunger: rany@att.net.mx ; P. Benjamín Romo, C.M. – Delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family: famvin@tin.it

An annual evaluation form will be sent to each country where the Vincentian Family is present, so that we might be able to determine how the programs were realized and assess if they have been effective on the short and long-term.

7. Information in the Web

- Vincentian Family: www.famvin.org
- Bread for the Word: www.bread.org
- Center on hunger and poverty: www.centeronhunger.org
- Coalition on Human need: www.chn.org
- The hunger site: www.thehungersite.com
- Community Food Security Coalition: www.foodsecurity.org
- Congressional Hunger Center: www.hungercenter.org
- Education Concerns for Hunger Organization: www.echonet.org
- Food First: www.foodfirst.org
- Food for the Hungry: www.fh.org
- Food Research and Action Center (FRAC): www.frac.org
- Freedom from hunger: www.freefromhunger.org
- The Hunger Project: www.thp.org
- Mazon: www.shamash.org/socaction/mazon
- Oxfam America: www.oxfamamerica.org
- World Hunger Year: www.worldhungeryear.org